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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

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III. Meetings management

A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with bodies concerning utilization of conference-servicing resources

1. At its 518th meeting, on 4 September 2012, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences containing statistical data and analysis of the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met at New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2011 (see A/67/127, paras. 4-15 and supplementary information, sect. II). The report recommended that the General Assembly should urge the six intergovernmental bodies whose average utilization factor for the past 10 years had been below the benchmark of 80 per cent to adjust their programmes of work at the planning stage, in order to reduce the waste of conference services. In addition, it was suggested that the Committee should consider whether there was a need to prepare the provisional biennial calendar of conferences and meetings in the economic, social and related fields for review by the Economic and Social Council.

2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chair on her mandate to hold consultations with the three intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for the past three consecutive years: the Committee on Contributions, the Commission for Social Development and the Statistical Commission. As a result, those committees had tentatively agreed to reduce their number of planned meetings. The Chair had also sent a letter offering suggestions to improve the utilization factor of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the single Geneva-based intergovernmental body that had utilized less than the established benchmark.

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Discussion

3. Several delegations questioned the feasibility of the recommendation made in the report on the pattern of conferences (A/67/127, para. 15) that the General Assembly should invite the Economic and Social Council to reconsider the need to review its provisional biennial calendar of conferences in the economic, social and related fields, as such a measure could have an impact on the legislative mandate of those bodies and could infringe on the prerogatives of the Economic and Social Council. Details were requested concerning measures, in addition to correspondence and meetings, that had been taken to ensure a more efficient use of conference services. An observer delegation noted that the functions and needs of each body should be taken into account before any measures were implemented, noting that several bodies required time to conduct extensive informal consultations. More information was requested concerning the criteria used to select the bodies to be included in the proposed expanded core sample used for data analysis.

4. A representative of the Secretariat said that the recommendation concerning the calendar of the Economic and Social Council had been made pursuant to General Assembly resolution 66/233, which requested the Secretary-General to identify duplication of work in conference services. The secretariat of the Council had been consulted when the recommendation had been drafted. Moreover, in its decision 1988/103, the Council had decided to invite the Committee on Conferences to make recommendations on the Council's calendar. Any decision made by the Committee in that regard would be brought to the attention of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council. Alternatively, a single United Nations calendar could be prepared, and the Committee could make separate recommendations to the Council and the Assembly.

5. Starting in 2012, meetings services reports were sent to the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies before the start of their sessions, providing data on the utilization of conference resources over the past three years, in order to promote their efficient use. The secretariats were also urged to provide advance notice of foreseeable cancellations of meetings and to reduce the time allotted to meeting blocks when less time was required. In order to collect useful data, the bodies in the core sample only included intergovernmental bodies that met on a regular basis. Those that met on an ad hoc basis or that had a limited mandate were not considered.

2. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required"

6. At the same meeting, the Committee also considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to the meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required" (see A/67/127, para. 16, and supplementary information, sect. III). The provision of services in New York had increased to 96 per cent in 2011, from 94 per cent in 2010.

3. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

7. Also at its 518th meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member

States (see A/67/127, para. 17 and supplementary information, sect. IV). In New York, 92 per cent of requests had been met in 2011, as compared to 96 per cent in 2010, while in Geneva, 89 per cent of requests had been met in 2011, as compared with 59 per cent in 2010.

Discussion

8. One delegation asked whether the decrease in the percentage of requests met in New York had been owing to last-minute cancellations of those requests, and if that was the case, what were the reasons for the cancellations. Another delegation wished to know whether or not there was a need for interpretation services among regional groupings in Vienna and Nairobi.

9. A representative of the Secretariat replied that Vienna and Nairobi only had the capacity of a single team of interpreters, which generally supported calendar bodies. In Nairobi, it had been possible to meet one request for provision of interpretation services to regional groupings of Member States in 2011. The decrease in requests met in New York had been owing to cancellations by the regional groupings; explanations were not documented, although the groupings could be asked to provide the reasons for the cancellations.

4. Utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

10. Also at the 518th meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/67/127, para. 18). In 2011, all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies had been held in Nairobi, in conformity with the headquarters rule.

5. Utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

11. At the same meeting, the Committee also considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (A/67/127, paras. 19-21). In 2011, the United Nations conference centre at ECA hosted and serviced 4,767 meetings, representing a utilization rate of 70 per cent, unchanged from 2010. The zero growth was attributable to the net effect of an aggressive marketing campaign and an increase in the number of hotels and conference halls available to host meetings in Addis Ababa.

Discussion

12. Further details were requested regarding the efforts being made to promote the conference centre at ECA. In the light of the inauguration of the conference complex of the African Union in 2012, which had compounded the already fierce competition, one delegation asked whether the United Nations Office to the African Union had explored the possibility of sharing conference services with the African Union. Another delegation suggested adjusting the parameters and criteria that were used to determine the utilization rate of the facilities at the conference centre so as to take into account the various external variables, including the stiffer competition. Other delegations asked whether the increase in competition had had an impact on the budget for the conference centre.

13. A representative of the Secretariat said that the 70 per cent utilization rate for the conference centre at ECA was in fact quite high considering the competition, which came not just from the African Union, but also from many five-star hotels that had been built in Addis Ababa and which provided more extensive facilities. ECA had conducted major radio campaigns, participated in conventions and contacted organizations outside of the United Nations system in order to attract new clients to the conference centre.

B. Impact of the capital master plan, strategy IV (phased approach), on meetings held at Headquarters during its implementation

14. Also at the same meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the impact on meetings held at Headquarters during the implementation of the capital master plan (see A/67/127, paras. 22-23, and supplementary information, sect. V).

15. One delegation requested detailed information on measures that had been taken to ensure that the electronic voting system would operate smoothly during the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. Relevant details would be provided by the Secretariat in writing.